Reviews


In its relatively short life, Freemuse (www.freemuse.org) has established itself as the foremost organisation for documenting instances of, and for campaigning against, music censorship. It was founded in 1999 as the World Forum on Music and Censorship, and has since then sponsored reports and conferences. This book and its accompanying CD are the result of its second international conference, held in 2002 in Copenhagen.

After three brief sections reflecting on some of the general issues raised by censorship, the bulk of Shoot the Singer! is taken up with case studies divided according to geographical region (Asia, Africa, Middle East, Americas and Europe). It is an important resource, recording the variety of ways in which censors operate and musicians respond. There are brutal stories of callous power that destroys lives and careers. And as you reel from the cruelty, you are struck too by the ability of music to provoke such reactions.

Among the most fascinating – and most moving – accounts contained in this book are two personal testimonies. The first by the South African musician Roger Lucey, who tells of how his professional life collapsed and how he learnt only belatedly that this was not the product of bad luck or personal failure, but the systematic attention of Paul Erasmus, an enthusiastic member of the South African security forces. Lucey learnt of Erasmus’s existence and his role when the latter confessed to his actions in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation process. As the result of a documentary made by Michael Drewett, and later at the 2002 Freemuse conference, these two men achieve their own reconciliation. Lucey somehow manages to forgive his persecutor, while Erasmus admits to the ways in which he came to value Lucey’s music even as he harassed him.

Among the other valuable chapters are John Baily’s detailed portrait of the treatment of music in Afghanistan. It reveals the persisting practice of music censorship both before and after the Taliban, and its particular impact on women (today ‘women can announce, read the news, recite poetry, act in plays, but they cannot sing’ [p. 26]). Baily also reveals, as do other authors, that even under the strictest regimes, musicians and their audiences defy the bans imposed on music. In Burma, for example, the women’s dormitories at Rangoon University doubled as the venue for music which was banned. Such strategies in the face of censorship invested music with a political power it might otherwise lack. According to Aung Zaw, this was true of Burma, where music served as an important medium for organising political opposition, in a situation where the authorities insisted on a minimum of four ‘constructive songs’ on albums (p. 48) and barred references to ‘beggars’ in lyrics – on the grounds that the government did not believe such people existed (p. 51).
Elsewhere we read of the complex dilemmas facing musicians in Zimbabwe, where, according to Banning Eyre, censorship is as much implied as formally implemented; where there is silence without written restrictions. Ameneh Youssefzadeh, by contrast, traces the direct connection between music censorship in Iran and the balance and character of political power. And these two themes – censorship without censors, the political context of censorship – reappear in Eriz Nuzum’s survey of music in the US in the aftermath of 9/11 and the Iraq war. Nuzum argues that musicians have become reluctant ‘to provide a voice for unpopular expression in the future’ (p. 156).

Although it is impossible not to be moved by the testimonies and shocked by the iniquities (and stirred by the music on the CD, its resonance heightened by the stories we are told), the book provokes as many questions as it answers. Four come to mind. First, despite the attempts by Martin Cloonan and others to raise questions about what we mean by ‘censorship’, few of the authors take up this challenge, and some chapters establish only a very tangential connection to the book’s key theme. Trains of thought are established around issues such as self-censorship, but they are not pursued in depth or detail. There are real difficulties in establishing what constitutes self-censorship, let alone how it might be documented (how often – if ever – do we say what we ‘really’ think, even in reviews – and how do we know what withering criticisms might have been omitted?)

Secondly, there is the issue of where, in studying censorship, we should be looking. Noam Ben-Zeev’s brief discussion of the case of Israel shifts attention from systems of censorship onto the moral and political responsibilities of musicians. He focuses on the absence of music censorship, itself connected, in his account, by the failure of Israeli musicians to challenge the dominant order and their willingness, with notable exceptions, to cooperate with it. There is scope for more attention on the ways in which musicians respond to censorship, a theme developed by Michael Drewett in his discussion of South Africa and by Ian Inglis in his comparison of the responses of Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones and the Doors to the censorship imposed by The Ed Sullivan Show.

Thirdly, there is the issue of how the ubiquity of censorship should be represented. In its global coverage, the book creates a slightly perverse effect. ‘Western’ censorship is represented only by the US, France and Turkey, and hence for European readers at least, it might seem that censorship is a product of other countries and other systems.

Finally, the implicit and (sometimes) explicit rationale of Freemuse and this book is that censorship is to be condemned. Censorship is presented as the opposite of freedom, and music as the epitome of free expression (Eric Nuzum writes, for example, ‘Music, at its most fundamental, is freedom’ [p. 153]). By this account, censorship is wrong. But I write this review as gay rights activists in the Caribbean and in the UK are campaigning against homophobia in the music of Beenie Man and Banju Banton, and in doing so they raise questions about the politics of censorship that need to be addressed more carefully if the study of music censorship is to advance beyond simple dichotomies.

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The history of theoretical and critical writing on film music is, so far, not unlike a case of the hiccups, though perhaps not so evenly spaced. There are some early prescriptions and musings, but the advent of sound on film occasioned the first burst of activity in the 1930s. Emblematic works here are Kurt London’s 1936 *Film Music* and Leonid Sabaneev’s 1935 *Music for the Films*. There was, of course, a world of music before sound on film, but it didn’t occasion a body of theoretical work.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, there are again a scattered series of works, many again by composers (like London and Sabaneev), the most important of which, by far, is Hanns Eisler and Theodor Adorno’s 1947 *Composing for the Films*. In the 1970s, there came another burst of activity, with *Film Music: A Neglected Art* (Roy Prendergast, 1977), *Film Music: from Violins to Video* (James Limbacher, 1974) and *Knowing the Score* (Irvin Bazelon, 1975). The range of approaches is the widest so far, but still these works did not open a vivid and ongoing critical conversation.

At the end of the 1980s, however, the publication of Claudia Gorbman’s *Unheard Melodies* (1987) announced a new period, one that shows every sign of curing the hiccup-like history of film music scholarship once and for all. *Unheard Melodies* was followed by *Settling the Score* (Kathryn Kalinak, 1992) and *Strains of Utopia* (Caryl Flinn, 1992). Since Flinn and Kalinak’s books, we have had Royal Brown’s *Overtones and Undertones* (1994), Martin Marks’ *Music and the Silent Film* (1997), Jeff Smith’s *The Sounds of Commerce* (1998), my own *Hearing Film* (2001), the three collections from Philip Brophy’s Cinesonic conferences, a special issue of this journal on ‘Music and Television’ (21/3, October 2002), *Popular Music and Film* (Inglis [ed.], 2003), forthcoming volumes including *Pop Fictions* (Lannin and Caley [eds.]) and *Sounds of the Slayer: Music and Silence in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Attinello and Knights [eds.]), and, of course, the volume under consideration here.

*MUSIC AND CINEMA* may well be the last grandiose project of this kind – everything since has chosen a tighter focus, an important early step in the maturation of a field. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this volume’s reach is both its greatest strength and its most formidable challenge. It is organised into five sections:

1. ‘Leitmotif: New Debates and Questions’, three essays addressing the legacies and deployments of Wagnerian ideas in film music and film music scholarship;
2. ‘Beyond Classical Film Music’, with essays on European cinema, New German Cinema, and US Independent filmmaking;
3. ‘Style and Practice in Classical Film Music’, four essays on specific Hollywood films and composers ranging from 1937 to 1962;
4. ‘Gender, Ethnicity and Identity’, a small group of essays on the feminine and the figure of the woman in Hollywood films;
5. ‘Methodological Possibilities’, a pair of essays each of which challenges the ‘business as usual’ of film music scholarship by introducing new analytical approaches.

Because of its scope, *Music and Cinema* provides a reasonable snapshot of the state of the field. Many of the important approaches are represented, although articles focusing on animation and another one or two on popular songs would have made significant additions. Its larger lacks – the complete absence of films outside Europe
and the US, its minimal discussions of race and of reception – are reflections of tendencies in the field as a whole. One longs for studies of Bombay and Nigerian film music practices, of musical discourses of religion in North African film, of the reception of Takemitsu’s Kurosawa scores. There is, of course, some work in such areas (see, e.g., Kyoko Koizumi’s work on Takemitsu and Amit Rai’s on Elvis’ influence in Bollywood), and in that light the editors might perhaps have cast a wider net.

That having been said, all books are what they are and are not what they are not. And so the omnipresent list, like mine above, of what should have been included, while necessary for the field, are perhaps unfair to the book that is the object of the list. In that spirit, then, a turn from absences to presences. One of the strengths of Music and Cinema is its genuine breadth of disciplines. As is often the case, scholars working in fields that cross disciplinary boundaries leave fingerprints of their disciplinary histories on their work, fingerprints that often prove to be a singular strength. In a collection, however, such strengths can also create difficult questions of balance.

Music and Cinema succeeds eminently in this respect. It includes in its body of important contributions to the literature a wide range of specializations: film scholars, music theorists, cultural studies scholars, musicologists, sociologists, psychologists, and media studies and literature faculty. Among the essays, a few in particular stand out to me – Scott Paulin’s ‘Richard Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Utility: The idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk in the history and theory of film music’, Wendy Everett’s ‘Songlines: Alternative journeys in contemporary European cinema’, Caryl Flinn’s ‘Strategy of Remembrance: Music and history in the new German cinema’, and Kathryn Kalinak’s ‘Disciplining Josephine Baker: Gender, race, and the limits of disciplinarity’. Not surprisingly, none of these is about Hollywood films, and this fact convinces me all the more of the urgency for film music scholarship to consider a wider range of questions and films. Critical and theoretical insights come as much from texts as they do from scholars. It stands to reason, then, that with a body of studies in hand, it is time for film music scholarship to turn its ears in other directions, to open ourselves to the untold lessons other film – and film music – traditions have to offer. Latin American, Asian, East European and African cinemas, and documentary, animation, and experimental film traditions worldwide offer fertile terrains for film music scholars – there is much more that has not been studied than has, and we could learn a lot from such pursuits, even about what we think we already know.

In the meantime, however, read Music and Cinema. It offers a wide swath of the best there is on offer at the moment.

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This book posits a historical relation between jazz and American ideology (p. 1). Nicholas Gebhardt argues that virtuosity ‘complicates the ideological frame’, which, in this case, is informed by ‘the material productive capacity of the American state’ (p. 23). Three case studies – Sidney Bechet, Charlie Parker and Ornette Coleman – each obligingly fit into a seductively symmetrical schema: Bechet manifests the virtuosity of construction, Parker of speed, and Coleman of illusion. The analysis is primarily based on commentary about and by these musicians. The emphasis is on their blackness:

To suggest a fundamental relation among the jazz act, American historical consciousness, and the state requires a critical appraisal of black music in terms of industrial modes of production and the dynamics of American social life since 1865. (p. 31)

Of course, simplifications are essential to cultural debate, but centralising ‘blackness’ as the key to the argument about jazz practice misleadingly ignores factors such as place, gender and socio-economics (which Ornette Coleman himself put ahead of blackness – p. 138). Factors other than blackness are signalled in the contribution made to the jazz tradition by white musicians of a range of extractions: Italians, Russians, Poles, Germans, Armenians and, especially, Jews. And the word ‘black’ as a way of linking these three musicians also skates over its internal hierarchies, from creole (Bechet, as it happens), down.

Furthermore, as one of the most aggressively diasporic musics of its era, ‘the jazz act’ requires more explanatory keys than US history.

...the task of an ideological analysis of the jazz act is to demonstrate how the historical processes of musical making are worked out in the virtuosic struggle between the forms of American exceptionalist ideology and the material forces of the American state. (p. 26)

Where is the ‘inseparable’ connection between ‘the “Fordist” logic of the American state and the creation of jazz’ (p. 23) when the jazz is being continuously ‘created’ in and through the diasporic process, by non-black practitioners somewhere other than the distinctive ideological framework of the US? Do we fall back on essentialist ‘authenticity’ and declare that this is not ‘real jazz’? Even within the US, which jazz
exactly are we talking about in a range of musics from the Cotton Club to Democrat Conventions, from New Orleans juke joints to Dallas shopping malls? Notwithstanding his sophisticated conceptual models, the writer flirts with an essentialist idealism when he subscribes to the view that the jazz act ‘can never be realised in sound’ (p. 23).

This sophistication is one of the heavy traces of what feels like a former doctoral thesis, including the need to show a mastery of theorists who have provided round holes into which postgraduates often find themselves forced to hammer the square peg of their subject. Much of the theoretical modelling invoked to corral the music was designed to encompass something else, and does not always throw light on the activity generally referred to as jazz. It may be a prosaically philistine question but: What can we do, change, predict, about how culture works, from some of these models? The lyrical vagueness of, for example, Baudrillard regarding ‘seduction’ (pp. 22–3) might mean almost anything, and for this reason has little explanatory and predictive power. At other times, such cultural theory is simply a mystifying way of saying the obvious, like circumnavigating the world to get to the other side of the street. Thus, Scarry, quoted to illustrate the relationship between New Orleans musicians and their audiences as being ‘implicated in each other’s sentience’ (p. 43):

... not only are the interior facts of sentience projected outward into the artifact in the moment of its making, but conversely those artifacts now enter the interior of other persons as the content of perception and emotion. (p. 44)

This adds little to a very simple reception model of the relationship between musician and audience, and one which is not exactly accurate, since ‘sentience’ is not always straightforwardly present in what a jazz musician plays (see, for example, ethnographies and the study of kinaesthetics – touched on in improvisation, e.g. p. 143). Nor do audiences always pay that much attention, and even when they do, what they assimilate is a total sensory environment which incorporates a soundscape in which the music projected by the musician is not the whole. In fact, it is what Scarry’s account leaves out of the process that is far the most interesting thing about the jazz dynamic.

Much of the discussion is shaped by what he is writing against:

this kind of analysis requires consideration of the process of mediation, a process that is usually ignored in formal musicological analysis or suppressed in more descriptive musical history. (p. 27)

This throws light on two of the features of the book likely to be disconcerting to popular music scholars: the relative dearth of reference to approaches that have evolved in popular music scholarship (where is, for example, Middleton?) – and therefore some rather laborious wheel-reinvention – and a massive amount of luggage from (non-musical) cultural theory as the counter-weight to traditional musicological discourse. Industrial-strength but ‘deaf’ cultural theorists (Jameson’s scopism increasingly seems to me an example of precisely what is counter-productive to an account of music) loom large.

The upside: it is inspiring to read a study of jazz which has such historical sweep. In fact, I think the work is much more impressive as US cultural history using three black jazz musicians as its case study, than as a way into a richer understanding of jazz phenomenology. The objectives of the book are admirable: to produce a ‘culturalist’ reading of a musical genre which, from the apparent perspective of the writer, has remained bogged down in formalist approaches. That he should seek to lever it out of the mire with instruments drawn from cultural theory rather than
through adaptations from popular music scholarship, makes the work an illustration of the peculiar divide that for so long existed between the latter and jazz studies. Elsewhere I have suggested that one reason for this is a historical disdain on the part of jazz writers and scholars for popular music as it was conceived from the late 1950s. Students wishing to embark on jazz research are thus likely to be assigned supervisors who are virtually unaware of popular music scholarship.

It is not clear to me what the book adds to the understanding of music (and jazz in particular) that has not already been arrived at by popular music studies. He declares that ‘we’ are not prepared

. . . to analyze what is at stake in those collective acts of musical making, or how those acts of musical making reorient the musician toward the wider social contexts of his or her musical sense. (pp. 50–1)

I don’t know who ‘we’ are in this. It is certainly not the army of popular music researchers and ethnomusicologists who, far from being unprepared to conduct such analysis, have that at the centre of their project. It is in the nature of a review that the reviewer – with his or her own tastes and prejudices – stands between the subject and the reader. Let me stand aside; here is part of one of the few discussions of a particular piece of music, Parker’s recording of ‘Embraceable You’:

The initial repetition of the motivic phrase . . . brings about a displacement of its conditions of possibility – the popular melodic style that sustained the profit margins of Tin Pan Alley and Broadway – onto the form of the act. The absence of the melody, therefore, is not indicative of an authentic mode of self-expression for each soloist, nor the basis for a pure act of communicative synthesis. Instead, the absence of Gershwin’s melody operates on the form of the musical act itself by directing the players toward the problem of how they were to play as a group.

He concludes:

In this context, the basis of their collective virtuosity was to have asserted the logic of the group’s ways over and above its dissolution into the act’s ideological abstraction as a sign of progress and profit. (p. 121)

If you like this kind of writing, there is a lot of it in this book.

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DOI: 10.1017/S026114300424034X

This book is the first general academic study to deal with punk after the 1970s and into the present. The analysis of punk style by Hebdige (1979) dominates the field, though Laing (1985) gives equal attention to punk’s challenge to the music industry. Most academic writing on punk accepts Hebdige’s analysis of its incorporation by the culture industry by 1978. The glaring problem with this is that punk did not disappear but instead evolved into many different underground scenes. Thompson’s book is not a semiotics of punk style. He uses Marx’s concept of the Commodity to analyse different punk scenes.
Instead of one moment of punk in the 1970s, Thompson describes seven scenes that each enters into History with somewhat different intentions. He says he wants to avoid the narrative of escape and capture that dominates academic writing on punk, but that is essentially his own position. Each wave of the punk project enters History and ultimately fails, leaving a utopian ‘unfinished business’ for the next generation. These scenes are New York punk (1974–1976), London punk (1976–1978), California hardcore (1978–1982), Washington D.C. Straight Edge (1979–1985), New York Straight Edge (1986–1989), Riot Grrrl (1991–1995), and Berkeley Pop-Punk (1990–1995). Someone who knows nothing about the recent history of punk and hardcore will learn a lot from the summaries that Thompson provides. But that is the danger. His account is based mainly on available published books. Any scene that is not written about by participants falls below his field of vision. The political bands around ABC No Rio (a squatted arts centre in New York) in the early 1990s are not mentioned simply because nobody has written a book about this scene (although there is a video). The radical leftist Straight Edge scene in the USA Midwest in the mid-1990s is left out because there is no book of interviews with participants. Thompson says in a footnote that he has chosen the largest and most important scenes. Bringing these other moments up from a footnote would deconstruct his neat history. Is it possible that the bands around ABC No Rio (such as Born Against and Go!) were a radical response to the conservative New York Straight Edge scene? Thompson’s history is almost all about the United States: nothing about influential bands from Finland, Italy, Brazil and Japan. But the major problem is that Thompson falsely unifies each scene, as if there were no internal differences. The 1970s English scene included art punk bands (Mekons), commercial bands (The Clash), street punk bands (Sham 69) and DIY anarcho-punks (the Crass collective). A careful reader will start to notice some of the internal contradictions of Thompson’s history. Is it London punks or an English scene? (Does that include Northern Ireland?) And why are the anarcho-punks not included in the scene histories but dealt with in Chapter Two under the rubric of challenges to capitalism? Were not Crass and Poison Girls (and many more anarcho-punks bands) an immediate response to the Sex Pistols? Thompson occasionally refers to punk as a field but his analysis has none of the sense of different positions within an artistic field (Bourdieu 1996).

This book is what one might expect a Marxist teacher of literature to write about punk. It is based on reading texts, usually books and zines produced within different scenes. And then there is an interpretation, often effected by drawing on Adorno, Benjamin or theories of avant-garde culture, but mainly by that big theoretical gun, the Commodity. David Graeber says in *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (2004) that there are thousands of academic Marxists but only a handful of anarchists. There is no ethnographic or sociological research in Thompson’s work. In his bibliography he lists one interview and two e-mails from scene participants. The book does read as if Thompson goes to shows and listens to punk bands. But actual social research would have challenged the concepts he imposes on the scene. I have read much the same books and fanzines as Thompson and been involved in the scene for ten years and yet there are many aspects of punk that deeply puzzle me.

He says some interesting things about homosocial bonds in some hardcore scenes. Yet his analysis of a Minor Threat song as being about a fear of homosexuality is unconvincing. The heterosexuality of the fanzine *Cometbus* is irritating. I am not sure how this could all be researched, but textual analysis will only get you so far. Eventually you will need to talk to hardcore kids about all this. The singer of
Los Crudos came out very publicly at shows around 1995 and then formed a band called Limpwrist to push the discussion within the scene. There is a great deal of emotion in hardcore, not all of it sexual desire.

It is useful to have academics at least recognise 1980s anarcho-punk (but also see the series of important historical articles by Lance Hahn in Maximumrocknroll), the Profane Existence anarchist collective and the controversial Crimethinc group. These should not be separated into a chapter on resistance to the Commodity but situated in the broader field of punk, which they are challenging and addressing. It is strange to have a professor of Critical Theory say nothing about the romanticism of Crimethinc writers. The analysis of crust is woefully inadequate and again points to the need for ethnography since this is among the least documented aspects of punk. This fast grinding music is deliberately unmarketable but there is also play with sexuality and even spirituality in this scene, and drugs too. It is astonishing to see an ethical and thoughtfully operated punk record label described as capitalist, or after twenty years of existence as a failure. The final chapter on punk film looks only at Rude Boy and Fight Club. They are strange choices. Many other more interesting videos are listed in a footnote. The analysis loses energy from repetition and the book tails off.

Thompson’s occasional warnings about the numerous modes and rhizomatic structure of punk (p. 70) and the multiplicity of subgenres (p. 79) are likely to be missed by many readers of the book. But these asides are probably the most important things he has to say. This book badly needs some thought about the relation between power and knowledge; not just Foucault’s intuition that all systems of organised thought (including Marxism) repress other potential ways of knowing, but more simply in terms of a radical pedagogy. This book is probably the best academic source on contemporary punk but armed with a theory of History and the Commodity, the author has not actually listened very much to punk kids. And written in academic prose, it gives very little back to the scene. If you write a book like this, organising an archive and imposing conceptual frameworks, you should be prepared for some angry responses: some wrong-headed but others deserved.

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